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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a drop-in day care program designed to meet the scheduling needs of the whole family. Among the topics discussed are the need for flexible scheduling, the scope of the program as a family support system, administration of a drop-in/flexible schedule program, the curriculum, and staffing flexible scheduling. Suggestions are made for training and supervision of staff. The day care program described has been in operation at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Day Care Center for six years and is based on the educational philosophy that children learn through play to understand the world in which they live. (CM)

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"Drop-In Day Care Is Good For Kids"

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ABSTRACT

We will present drop-in day care utilizing flexible scheduling as an alternative day care model. Flexible scheduling allows day care to become a family support system as opposed to simply being a child care system. More and more families require that all adult members be employed in order to maintain economic stability. Employment opportunities available in these situations are not always the traditional work weeks. To provide support for these families, day care centers must increasingly offer a program of flexible scheduling. Such scheduling must be able to accomodate traditional full time schedules, variable full and part-time schedules and schedules of students. We maintain that a sound educational program can be provided within a flexible scheduling environment which meets the needs of the family as a whole. We offer a working alternative to traditional day care. This presentation includes:

1. The Need for Flexible Scheduling
2. The Scope of the Program as a Family Support System
3. Administering a Drop-in/Flexible Schedule Program
4. The Curriculum
5. Staffing Flexible Scheduling

The need for day care has continued to grow due to the changing structure of American society. With increased availability of transportation, we have become a more mobile population. This mobility has broken down the supportive network of relatives and neighbors who were once available to care for a child when the parents were absent. Today, extended families and neighborhoods no longer stay together for long periods of time. In addition to this, increasing numbers of families require that both parents be employed to maintain economic stability. Single parents must work, and many parents are returning to school to further their careers. In addition to this, employment is no longer the traditional nine to five, five-day work week. To provide support for these families, day care centers must begin to offer programs with flexible scheduling. This means being able to accomodate full-time schedules, varying part-time schedules, and the erratic schedules of students and temporary employees.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Day Care Center we have been successfully using flexible scheduling for six years. Our development of this model was in direct response to the needs of the University population. Flexible scheduling allows children to be enrolled in the Center anywhere from 2 to 45 hours per week. This program can and must provide a sound basis for growth and development in order to meet the needs of the children and consequently, the family as a whole.

Children are accepted from age 6 months in the Infant Room to 10 years in the After-School Program. There are eight rooms, each with a full-time, certified Head Teacher. Each Head Teacher is involved in all aspects of day care, helping to make the Center a valuable place for children. He/she plans the program for the developmental age of the child and implements that program. Each Head Teacher hires, trains, supervises and evaluates

his/her own staff of day care aides. Head Teachers are also involved in making Center-wide policy decisions, meeting Federal and State licensing requirements, fund raising activities, and working with parents and public relations.

The educational program is implemented within an Open Classroom format, where structure is placed on the programming rather than on the children. The goals of the program are social and emotional development, development of positive self-concept, intellectual competency, development of language skills, self-expression skills, and development of physical skills. The primary vehicle for meeting these goals is play. Through play a child can explore and come to understand the world and his/her role in it. In group play, children continuously adjust and refine their thinking in order to get along well with their playmates. Children learn sharing, consideration and tolerance.

When planning the curriculum to meet these educational goals, we concern ourselves with the content of play. Weekly units are designed as a focus for play activities. The concepts in these units are taught through art, music, manipulative play, physical play, dramatic play and games. The Open Classroom/play theory fits perfectly into flexible scheduling. Whether a child attends for two hours or 45 hours a week the experience is a valuable one. Some special considerations are needed with this type of scheduling. Activities cannot be started at a time when children are likely to be coming or going, as this will disrupt the learning experience. Special planning is needed for any extended endeavor, such as a 2-day art project, because different children may be in attendance on the second day. Field trips and walks require special planning and their length must be limited unless special arrangements are made.

The key to insuring quality care and educational programming lies with the Head Teacher and his/her support staff. These people are flexibly scheduled. This enables us to staff according to the number of children in the room each hour. It is crucial, in order to implement our program, that staff members are trained to understand total room operation with flexible scheduling in mind.

Training and supervision of staff must be thorough and continuous. There are four methods of implementing training:

1. At the beginning of the academic year there is an initial orientation. The Director, Head Teachers, Day Care Aides and office personnel assemble to receive and present information regarding Center-wide procedures and policies. In addition to giving an overall picture of the Center's operation, staff are impressed with the fact that "we all work together" -- every person is important to the functioning of the Center. Next, a staff orientation slide show is shown which depicts an average day in the Center. This helps to convey the general atmosphere we wish to create for children. This is followed by individual room orientations. The room orientations provide an opportunity for staff to become familiar with the Head Teacher and his/her philosophy, the room, it's equipment, materials, basic procedures, and other staff members. A complete tour of the building is also given.
2. A staff training manual prepared by the Head Teachers is utilized so that staff can digest information in a concise, orderly and comprehensive manner. This manual becomes a springboard for questions and discussions. The manual is divided into chapters concerning: Work Accountability, Staff Evaluations, Educational Programming,

Self-Concept and Individual Differences, Parent Forms, Safety, Fire Drill Procedure, Accidents and Illnesses, Room Maintainence, Bathroom Procedures, Food Concerns, Nap Time, and Playground and Gym.

3. Training occurs through bi-monthly staff meetings of individual rooms. These are held: a) to aid in equal input and dissemination of information regarding procedures in the room and in the Center; b) to discuss present and future units of learning; c) to provide solutions to problems; d) to provide an opportunity for staff members to communicate with the Head Teacher, who acts as their representative in situations where decisions which affect them are being made. Staff meetings mean cooperative effort in establishing consistency and continuity for the children in our care.
4. Head Teachers serve as models for staff members, through guidance and consultation on a daily basis. Additionally, experienced staff act as models for new staff. It is preferable to start with inexperienced staff since they come with fewer preconceived notions. The Head Teacher plays an important role in influencing and shaping their ideas and attitudes.

We want to insure that time spent in training results in a staff member returning to work in following semesters. For this reason, particular importance must be paid to staff morale.

It is important to instill certain values such as: 1) Day care can be a positive experience for children; 2) Staff should not regard themselves as babysitters but as teachers because these are the most impressionable years of a child's life; and 3) A day care center is as good as its staff. The learning process begins as soon as the Head Teacher relays

his/her expectations to staff and methods for carrying out responsibilities. Head Teachers attempt to convey positive attitudes and sensitivity in the supervision process. A Head Teacher will create an atmosphere of growth and involvement for staff through effective planning and conscious development of pride, caring and loyalty.

It must be possible for staff to work in small groups in order to individualize and establish good adult/child relationships. Staff should be encouraged to use, and be recognized for, their unique and individual skills. They must be able to share ideas. Variety in their jobs is possible through schedules which aid in sharing and distributing responsibilities. These same schedules help to streamline non-child care duties. Consideration of their needs as students ismanifested by offering them flexible schedules to accomodate their class and study time.

Staff are given space to make decisions and choices, are helped to recognize their individual and group growth and the relationships they've developed with the children. We consider our staff capable Day Care Aides. They are evaluated as such, and job performance is discussed in these terms at the end of each semester.

We believe that children and adults alike learn through direct experiences. Making this philosophy apparent to parents, staff and children helps us to better realize our goals. If families are to grow together in productive and meaningful ways it is important that each member be able to develop themselves as individuals.

At the National Campus Child Care Annual Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in May, 1977, the general findings were that most campus and campus-community day care centers made use of flexible scheduling. The consensus was that the problems faced by these centers were not related

to the manner in which children were scheduled.

Just as the need for day care is being recognized, the need for quality day care is being increasingly recognized. One measure of quality which can be provided is flexible scheduling; providing time and thus, monetary options to families.

As day care continues to explore and define itself, campus day care will be able to serve as a positive model in the area of flexible scheduling.

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